

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

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HOMEBOUND MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES WIN RELIEF IN HOUSE MEDICARE MARKUP

Markey amendment frees up to 15,000 'homebound' beneficiaries from restrictive rule

Washington, DC: Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has included a key provision in the Medicare bill to increase the freedom of the most severely and permanently disabled Medicare beneficiaries to leave their homes without forfeiting their home health benefits. Under current Medicare law, home health patients only can take trips outside of their homes that are "infrequent" or "of short duration." If a spouse or family member takes a home health patient on a drive to the beach or trip to the supermarket, a patient can lose her "homebound" status and have her benefits terminated. Trips to medical appointments, adult day care or religious services are currently the only exceptions to the rule, and those exceptions were the result of Rep. Markey's 2000 amendment.

"I am gratified that my amendment was incorporated into the Medicare bill that the Energy and Commerce Committee passed last night. The patients affected by the amendment are among America's most vulnerable – they have Lou Gehrig's Disease, late stage Alzheimer's and other chronic, severe conditions. These patients should not be bound by the same limits placed on departures from the home that all other home health beneficiaries currently must abide by. These beneficiaries are not trying to exploit the system by remaining on home health care even after their condition has improved. Unfortunately, for the patients covered by my amendment, their condition never will improve. Their medical condition prevents them from enjoying many activities that the rest of us take for granted; Medicare shouldn't further isolate them by effectively imprisoning them in their home," Rep. Markey said.

Rep. Markey's amendment establishes a two-year pilot program within Medicare which:

- Enables up to 15,000 individuals with severe and permanent disabilities to be exempt from any restrictions on their departures from the home;
- Requires the Department of Health and Human Services to analyze whether exempting this population from restrictions on their movement will produce any significant costs to the Medicare home health program;
- Directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to report to Congress at the conclusion of the demonstration project about the costs incurred from the demonstration project, if any. If any costs are directly attributable to the exemption, then the Secretary must provide recommendations on how to refine the exemption to reduce costs to an insignificant level.

"Yesterday's victory was the culmination of a three year-long battle to free severely disabled Americans from the shackles of Medicare's restrictions on their movement. Yesterday also was the 100th birthday of baseball legend Lou Gehrig – whose affliction with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) forever connected a famous and revered name to a devastating, debilitating illness. Patients with Lou Gehrig's Disease will be able to be covered by the amendment passed yesterday. Much of the credit goes to a courageous man from

Georgia, Mr. David Jayne, who continues to battle Lou Gehrig's Disease. David's determination to bring attention to the Medicare homebound restriction has been indispensable to the effort to free severely and permanently disabled beneficiaries from Medicare's homebound restrictions.

"We now focus our energy on getting this important provision included in the final bill that will be considered by the House of Representatives next week and in any final Medicare bill that may be passed by the Congress and sent to the President for his signature. With people like David Jayne on our team, I'm confident that we will prevail," Rep. Markey concluded.

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